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**U.S. needs more, not fewer, immigrant workers**

**By A. HAAG SHERMAN  
HOUSTON CHRONICLE**

**June 19, 2010, 4:19PM**

Contrary to popular opinion, America does not have an immigration problem, but its current policies are creating one. In particular, America remains an attractive destination for immigrants, a boon for this nation. However, America is rapidly losing its competitive advantage in attracting immigrants to our shores. The loss to America, and its standing in the world, will be catastrophic.

Not surprisingly, America's biggest failure is a lack of understanding about the profound benefits of immigration. Immigration is this country's great "free lunch" and it represents a significant transfer of wealth from the rest of the world to the U.S. By way of example, think of an immigrant — even an unskilled one - coming to the U.S. at age 18. As any parent knows, the cost of producing an 18-year-old is significant (clothing, shelter and rudimentary education). Based on my research, the cost is approximately $150,000 to produce even a menial laborer in the United States. Obviously, the more skilled the worker, the greater the cost and value. An Indian with a degree from the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology is probably worth closer to $1 million. Given this data and immigration patterns, the total transfer of wealth from the rest of the world to the U.S. is approximately $300 billion per annum.

Our lack of understanding is borne out by the fact that America's current account calculation does not add the net benefits from immigration. In its simplest terms, America's current account is equal to our trade balance (currently a deficit) plus inflows and outflows of capital. But, this calculation only recognizes a flow of financial capital. The constant flow of semiskilled and skilled workers into the U.S. is a tremendous inflow of human capital. If taken into account, America's current account deficit would decline from about $600 billion per annum to $300 billion - a significant improvement.

The value of immigration is accentuated when comparing America's demographics with those of the rest of the developed world. Largely due to healthy immigration, America will have a growing population for the remainder of this century, standing alone among major developed nations. Japan and Europe will see their populations decline over the decades to come. More ominously, China - due to its one-child policy - will see its population age and decline by the middle part of this century, calling into question whether China will modernize before it ages. It remains to be seen whether a nation can remain a world leader with a declining population. Recent history has no precedent. The precedent set during the late Middle Ages - when Europe's population declined - provides a dismal omen.

With the need for a stable population in mind, a liberal immigration policy seems not only logical, but in this nation's best interest. But immigration critics point to several problems. First, illegal immigrants are a drain on this nation's social services. Second, illegal immigration represents a potential national security threat. Third, cultural conservatives point to an erosion of American culture. All of these arguments represent valid points, but could be addressed with a liberal, yet controlled, immigration policy.

In particular, the U.S. should allow any foreign national to immigrate to the United States if that person: (a) pays a one-time fee of $1,000 and a $500 annual fee thereafter; (b) is issued a "green card" with an embedded microchip; (c) holds a job; (d) undergoes an extensive background check before entry; and (e) checks in with immigration once a year.

**Thought Questions**

1. Why does the author refer to immigration as a “free lunch”?
2. What are some benefits America receives from immigration?
3. How does immigration help America compete with the rest of the world?
4. Do you think this article would have also applied a hundred years ago? How much of our historical development do you think is a result of immigrants or immigration?
5. Do you agree with the claims made in this article? Why or Why not?
6. American currently has around 310,000,00 people. Do you think American can handle large scale immigration?